

## **County's proposed budget looks to maintain status quo**

By Jim Moore of the Daily Courier

Community

May 09, 2014

Josephine County's proposed operating budget for fiscal year 2014-15 is almost identical to the current budget.

However, the overall budget is about \$15.5 million larger than the current budget due to capital projects and grant money from state and federal sources that must be spent on specific departments and programs.

The boost doesn't help high profile departments such as public safety — which includes the sheriff, district attorney and juvenile justice system — or animal protection.

In fact, the mantra for all departments as they prepared their proposed budgets was to maintain the status quo. The fiscal year starts July 1.

The operating budget of \$15.1 million is almost identical to the current budget. That total includes \$3.6 million in contingency, leaving \$11.6 million in operating funds.

Rosemary Padgett, the county's chief financial officer, presented the overall proposed budget of \$84.3 million to the six-member budget committee Thursday night. The current adopted budget is \$68.7 million.

The vast majority of the budget consists of so-called "pass-through" money, that comes from the state and federal governments but is administered by the county. County officials have little discretion on how that money is spent.

The increase of about \$15.5 million is spread across multiple departments, with the bridge construction fund, roads and bridges reserve fund and property reserve fund accounting for a \$4.5 million increase. The transit fund will increase by \$3 million and there is about \$1 million more coming into the airport fund.

All of that extra money is related to federal and state grants — gas tax, Federal Aviation Administration grants, and others — and can't be spent on other programs such as public safety.

Meanwhile, Commissioner Keith Heck, for the second year in a row, requested that his salary be reduced by 15 percent to \$63,7000 annually. Heck acknowledged that rather than reducing his salary he could accept his paycheck and then donate money, but that he doesn't want the community to have to pay for his generosity.

Budget Committee Chairman Pat Fahey joined Heck in voting for the request, but it was turned down by a 4-2 vote.

Commission Chairwoman Cherryl Walker and Commissioner Simon Hare, both of whom have declined to accept Public Employee Retirement System payments in the past, voted against the request as did Budget Committee members Marie Hill and Jim Brumbach.

The next Budget Committee meeting will be 6 p.m. Thursday at Anne Basker Auditorium, 604 N.W. Sixth St., next the county courthouse.

Presentations by the sheriff, district attorney, and juvenile justice are scheduled.

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